

Dethronements

Imaginary portraits of political
characters done in dialogue

Laurence Housman



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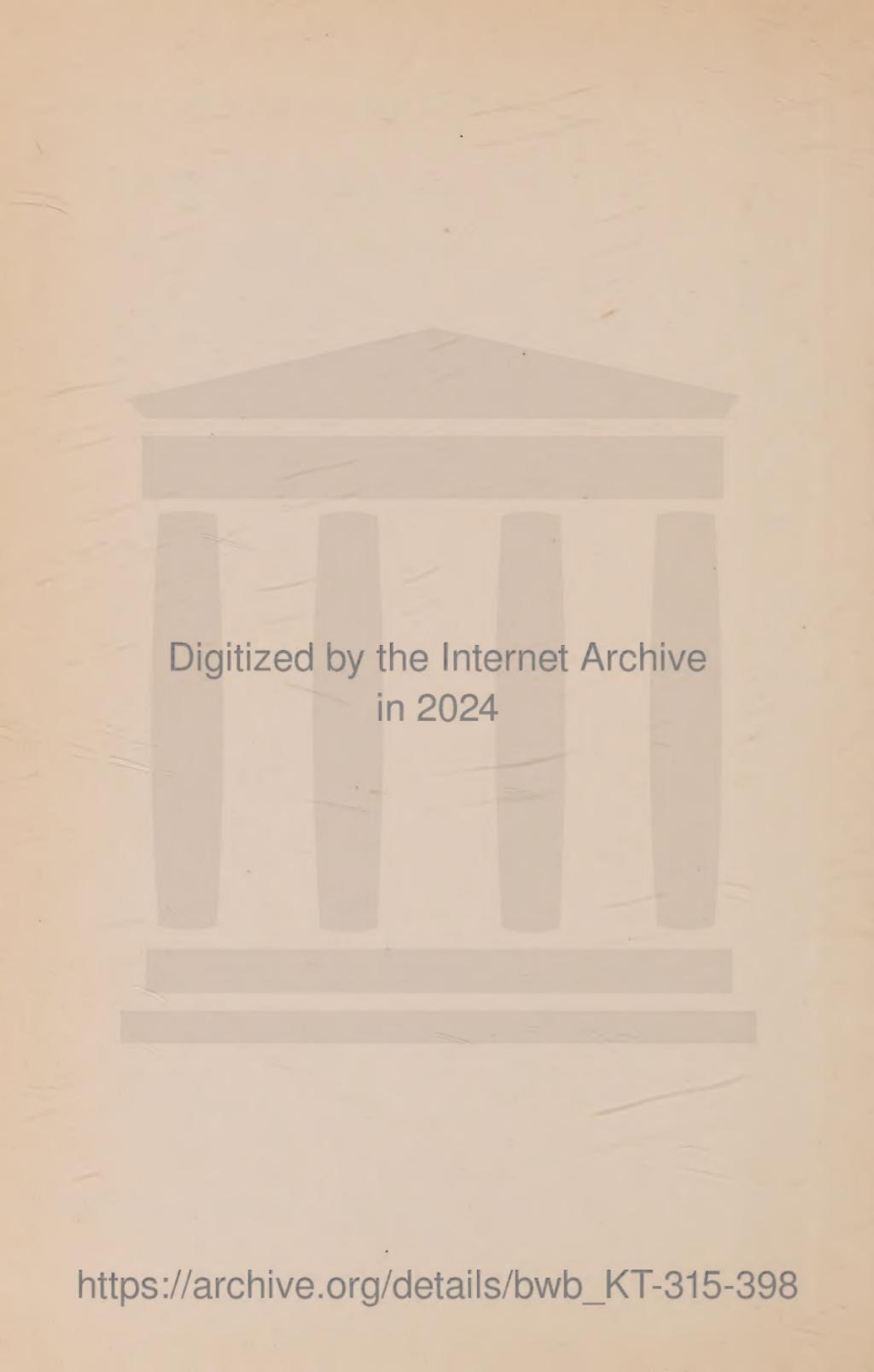
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Dethronements

Imaginary Portraits of Political
Characters, done in Dialogue

Laurence Housman

Author of "Angels & Ministers"



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Preface

THE written dialogue, as interpretative of character, is but a form of portraiture, no more personally identified with its subject than drawing or painting ; nor can it claim to have more verisimilitude until it finds embodiment on the stage. Why then, in this country at any rate, is its application to living persons only considered legitimate when associated with caricature ? So sponsored, in the pages of *Punch* and the composition of Mr. Max Beerbohm, it has become an accepted convention too habitual for remark. Yet caricature and verbal parody may be as critical both of personality and character as dialogue more seriously designed, and may have as important an influence not merely upon a public opinion, but upon its moral judgment as well.

The defection of *Punch* was felt by Gladstone to be a serious set-back to the fortunes of his Home Rule policy ; and Tenniel's cartoon of "the Grand old Janus," saying "Quite right !" to the police who were bludgeoning an English mob, and "Quite wrong !" to the police who were bludgeoning an Irish one, was a personal jibe which hit him hard.

The customary device, where contemporaries are

concerned, of disembowelling the victim's name, and leaving it a skeleton of consonants, is a formal concession which in effect concedes nothing. Nor is there any reason why it should ; for the only valid objection to the medium of dialogue is in cases where its form might mislead the reader into mistaking fiction for fact, and the author's invention for the *ipsissima verba* of the characters he portrays. I hope that this book will attract no readers so unintelligent. Having chosen dialogue for these studies of historical events because I find in it a natural and direct means to the interpretation of character, my main scruple is satisfied when I have made it plain that they have no more authenticity because they happen to be written in dramatic form, than they would have were they written as political essays. These are imaginary conversations which never actually took place ; and though I think they have a nearer relation to the minds of the supposed speakers than have King's speeches to the person who utters them, they must merely be taken as a personal reading of characters and events, tributes to men for all of whom I have, in one way or another, a very great respect and admiration ; and not least for the one whom, with a reticence that is symbolical of the part he played in the downfall of "The Man of Business," I have here left nameless.

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The King-maker

Note

READERS of this dialogue may need to be reminded, for clearer understanding, of the following sequence of events. On November 15th, 1890, a *decree nisi* was pronounced in the undefended divorce suit O'Shea *v.* O'Shea and Parnell. On November 24th, Gladstone, in a letter to John Morley, stated that Parnell's retention of the Irish leadership would be fatal to his own continued advocacy of the Irish cause. In December, the majority of the Irish Party threw over Parnell in order to placate the "Non-conformist conscience," and retain the co-operation of the Liberal Party under Gladstone's leadership. During the months following, Parnell and his adherents suffered a series of defeats at by-elections in Ireland. In June 1891, immediately on the *decree nisi* being made absolute, Parnell married Katharine O'Shea. On October 6th he died.

Dramatis Personæ.

CHARLES STEWART PARNELL

(*Dethroned “King” of Ireland*).

KATHARINE PARNELL

(*His wife : divorced wife of Captain O’Shea*).

A MAN

(*Ex-valet to Captain O’Shea*).

A SERVANT.

The King-maker

Brighton. October 1891.

In a comfortably furnished sitting-room, with windows looking upon the sea-parade, a Woman of distinguished beauty sits reading beside the fire, so intently occupied that she pays no heed to the entry of the Servant, who unobtrusively lights the gas, draws down the blinds, and closes the curtains. Then taking up a tea-tray, served for two, she retires, and the reader is left alone. But not for long. The slam of the street-door causes an attention which the coming and going of the Servant has failed to arouse; and now, as the door opens, the brightened interest of her face tells that, without seeing, she knows who is there. Quietly, almost furtively, she lets fall the paper she has been reading, and turns to her husband eyes of serene welcome, meeting confidently the sharp interrogation of his glance.

PARNELL. What are you doing ?

KATHARINE. I was reading.

PARNELL. Yes ? What ?

KATHARINE. Those papers you just brought in.

PARNELL. And I told you not to.

KATHARINE (*smiling*). I was wilful and disobeyed.

PARNELL (*picking up the paper, and looking at it with contemptuous disgust*). Why did you ?

KATHARINE. Isn't "wilful" a sufficient answer, my dear ?

(*And with a covert look of amusement she watches him tear and throw the paper into the fire.*)

Why do you try to make me a coward ? You aren't one yourself.

PARNELL. That gutter-stuff ! (*And the second paper joins its fellow in the flames.*)

KATHARINE. Now wasn't that just a bit unnecessary ? After all, they are helping to make history. That is public opinion—the voice of the people, you know.

PARNELL. Not *our* people !

KATHARINE. Oh ? Have you brought back any better news—from there ?

PARNELL. Nothing special. The result of the election was out.

KATHARINE. You didn't wire it. How much were we to the bad ?

PARNELL. A few hundred. What does more or less matter ? It's—it's the priests who are winning now.

KATHARINE. With divided congregations as the result.

PARNELL. Yes. But I'd rather they won than the politicians. They are honest, at any rate. Poor fools !

KATHARINE. So it's the real country we are seeing now ?

PARNELL. Yes. That's the material I've had to work with !

KATHARINE. Wonderful—considering.

PARNELL. And now—now one gets to the root ! But I always knew it.

KATHARINE. So you are not disappointed ?

PARNELL. No ; only defeated. Yet I did think once that I was going to win.

KATHARINE. So you will.

PARNELL. When I'm dead, no doubt . . . some day. You can't fight for a winning cause, and not know that.

KATHARINE. But you are not going to die yet, dearest.

PARNELL (*with a deep sigh of dejection*). Oh ! Wifie, I'm so tired, so tired !

KATHARINE. Well, who has a better right ? Be tired, my dear ! Give yourself up to it : let everything else go, and just rest ! You *are* tired out. That's what I've been telling you.

PARNELL. Too much to do yet. Even dying would take more time than I can spare just now.

KATHARINE. But you must spare time to live, my dear—if you really wish to.

PARNELL. Wish? I never wished it more—for now I *am* living. I'm awake. Doubts are over.

KATHARINE. King . . . look at me! Don't take your eyes away, till I've done. . . . One of those papers said (what others have been saying) that it was I . . . I . . . need I go on?

PARNELL (*with grim tenderness*). Till you've done: you said . . .

KATHARINE. I—that have ruined you.

PARNELL. That's just what they would say, of course. It's so easy: and pleases—so many.

KATHARINE. All the same—by mere accident—mayn't it be true? It *has* happened, you know, sometimes, that love and politics haven't quite gone together.

PARNELL. Love and politics never do. Do you think I've loved any of my party-followers: that any of them have loved me?

KATHARINE. Doesn't—O'Kelly?

PARNELL. He's gone now—with the rest.

KATHARINE. Didn't Mr. Biggar?

PARNELL. Dead. . . . No.

KATHARINE. Still, you love—Ireland.

PARNELL. Not as she is to-day—so narrow and jealous, so stupid, so blind! Has she anything alive in her now worth saving? That Ireland has got to

die ; and, though it doesn't sound like it, this is the death-rattle beginning. Ireland is going to fail, and deserves to fail. But another Ireland won't fail. She's learning her lesson—or *will* learn it, in the grave. Something like this was bound to come ; but if it were to come again twenty years on, it wouldn't count. She'd know better.

KATHARINE. Twenty years ! We shall be an old couple by then.

PARNELL. In the life of a nation twenty years is nothing. No. Ireland was shaped for failure : she has it in her. It had got to come out. Subjection, oppression, starvation, haven't taught her enough : she must face betrayal too, of the most mischievous kind—the betrayal of well-meaning fools. After that, paralysis, loss of confidence, loss of will, loss of faith—in false leaders. Then she'll begin to learn.

KATHARINE. Do you mean that everything *has* failed now ?

PARNELL. Yes ; if *I* fail. I'm not thinking of myself as indispensable : it's the principle. That's what I've been trying to make them understand. But they won't, they won't ! Independence, defiance—they don't see it as a principle, only as an expedient. They may make it a cry, they may feel it as their right ; but when to insist on it looks like losing a point in the game—then they give up the principle, to become parasites ! That's what is happening now. It's the slave in the blood coming out—the crisis of the disease. That's why I'm fighting it : and will, to the death ! And when—when we are

dead—some day : she'll come to her senses again—and see ! Then—this will have helped.

KATHARINE. But will it ?

PARNELL. Why ? Don't you believe that Ireland will be free some day ?

KATHARINE. I did when she chose you for her leader.

PARNELL (*bitterly*). A dead leader, one whom she can't hurt, may do better for her.

KATHARINE. Don't say "dead" !

PARNELL. I shan't be alive in twenty years, my dear. And it may take all that.

KATHARINE. Without you it will take more.

PARNELL. It won't be "without me." That's what I mean. They may beat me to-day ; but I shall still count. Think of all Ireland's failures ! Grattan's Parliament counts ; "Ninety-eight" counts ; Fitzgerald counts ; O'Connell counts ; her famines, her emigrations, her rebellions—all count.

KATHARINE. Does Butt count ?

PARNELL. He wasn't a failure : he didn't try to do anything. If Ireland needs more failures, to make a case for her conviction, shall I grudge mine ? Yes, all her failures count : they get into the blood ! Why, even the silly statues in her streets mean more than statues can mean here. Prosperity forgets ; adversity remembers. Even hatred has its use : it grips, and drives men on.

KATHARINE. Did you need—hatred, to do that for you ?

PARNELL. Yes : till I got love ! . . . Reason, conviction aren't enough. Morley said a good thing the other day. The English, he said, meant well by Ireland : but they didn't mean it much.

KATHARINE. I suppose that's true of some ?

PARNELL. Quite true : and what is the most that it amounts to ? Compromise. Morley's an authority on compromise. And yet I like him : I get on with him. But he's too thick with Gladstone to be honest over this. Curious *his* having to back the conventions, eh ?

KATHARINE. Why does he ?

PARNELL. Because the political salvation of his party and its leader comes before Ireland. He means well by her : but he doesn't mean it so much as all that. Still he's the only one of them who doesn't pretend to look on me as a black sheep. He too has to work with his material. That's politics. The Nonconformist conscience means votes—so it decides him : just as the priests decide me. . . . They would decide him in any case, I mean. And so—so it goes on. . . . "Look here upon this picture, and on this" : Ireland trying to please England ; England trying, now and then, to please Ireland ! I don't know which is the more ludicrous ; but I know that both equally must fail. And they've got to see it !—and some day they will. It won't be "Home Rule" then. . . .

*(So far a while he sits and thinks, his hand
in hers. Then he resumes.)*

My ruin ? What would my ruin matter anyway ? Put it, that the making public of our claim—our right to each other—is to be allowed by any possibility to affect the cause of a nation—the justice of that cause: doesn't that fact, if true, show that the whole basis of the political principles they have so boasted, and on which we have so blindly relied, was utterly and fantastically false and rotten ? Haven't we, providentially, given the world the proof that it needed of its own lie ?

KATHARINE. We didn't give it, my dear.

PARNELL. Well, their proof has satisfied them, anyhow: as they are acting on it. Oh ! When I see what poor, weak things nations really are—so inadequately equipped for the shaping of their own destinies—I wonder whether in truth the history we read is not the wrong history—mere side history, to which a false significance has been given, because so much blood and treasure have been expended on it, which just a little expenditure of common sense might have spared. . . . Think of all the silly accidents and blunders, in Ireland's great chapter of accidents, which have counted for so much—even in these last few years ! . . . The Phœnix Park business—an assassination, for which perhaps only a dozen men were responsible—and at once, for that one act, more suppression and hatred and coercion are directed against a whole nation : Crimes Acts, packed juries, judges without juries, arrests without

charge, imprisonments without trial. So logical, isn't it? What a means for putting a foreign Government right in the eyes of the people who deny its moral authority! . . . And then—Pigott, that shallow fraud, driven to suicide by those who were at first so eager to believe him: and the exposure of his silly forgery turns elections, makes Home Rule popular! Coming by such means, would it be worth it? . . . Gladstone, honourably hoodwinking himself all those years, accepting you as our secret go-between—and you making no pretence, my dear! Oh, I suppose it was the right and gentlemanly thing for him to pretend not to know. It was also, it seems, good politics. Chamberlain knew too—must have known; for Chamberlain's no fool; and yet to his friend, the deceived husband, said nothing! It wasn't politics; not then. Now—now it's the great stroke, and Home Rule goes down under it. . . . Is that history, or is it "Alice in Wonderland"? . . . If you are my ruin now, you were also my ruin then, when you were helping me to think that I could win justice for a nation from politicians like these: win it by any means except by beating them, bringing them to their knees, making them red with the blood of a people always in revolt, till their reputation stinks to the whole world! And when they do at last climb down and accept the inevitable, then their main thought will be only how to save their own face—and make it look a little less like the defeat they know it to be!

KATHARINE. My dear, you are so tired. Do rest!

PARNELL. I *am* resting: for now—thanks to you

—I have got at the truth! Political history is a thing made up of accidents; but not so the fate of men or of nations whose will is set to be free. No accident there! That you were tied to a man you wouldn't live with, who wouldn't live with you—was an accident. But our love was no accident; it was waiting for us before we knew anything. You and I had each a star which shone at the other's birth.

KATHARINE. Your star was mine, dearest. I hadn't one of my own.

PARNELL. Well, if nations wish to be fooled, let them go to the devil their own way, not laying the blame of their own folly on others! But having got *you*—would I ever have let you go for any power under Heaven? Why (as soon as you were free) did I marry you? I knew that, politically, it was a blunder: that over there it would go against us—prove the case. Half Ireland cared nothing for the verdict of an English jury. But when we married, they had to believe it then. . . . Well, I wanted them to believe it. I know my love would have waited, had I asked her. And it wasn't—it wasn't honour, my dear; it was much more pride: for I am a proud man, that I own: and not less since I have won you.

KATHARINE. If you hadn't been proud, dearest, you would never have got my love.

PARNELL. Oh, yes, I should. Those who love, don't love for qualities good or bad. They love them in the person they love—that's all. You have

qualities which I didn't care about till I found them in you. To love is to see life—new !

KATHARINE. And whole. Some day—alone by ourselves—we will !

PARNELL. Don't we already ?

KATHARINE. Yes, if only—these other things didn't interfere. But I promised ; so they must.

PARNELL. My dear, when they have quite broken me—they will in time—then I'll come.

KATHARINE. You promise to go right away ?

PARNELL. I promise, sweetheart.

(Moving toward each other they are about to embrace, when the door opens, and the Servant enters carrying a card upon a tray.)

SERVANT. If you please, sir.

(Parnell takes the card ; there is a pause while he looks at the name.)

PARNELL. Will you say I am engaged.

(The Servant goes. Parnell hands the card to his wife.)

I don't know the man. Do you ?

KATHARINE. No. And yet I seem to remember. Yes ; Willie had a man-servant of that name.

(The Servant returns, bearing a folded note upon her tray.)

SERVANT. If you please, sir, I was to give you this.

PARNELL (*having read the note*). Is the man still there?

SERVANT. Yes, sir.

(*There is a pause.*)

PARNELL. Show him in.

(*As the Servant goes he hands the note to Katharine, and watches while she reads it.*)

So—you remember him?

KATHARINE. Only the name. . . . I may have seen him, now and then.

(*And then enters a smooth-shaven man, sprucely dressed, with the irreproachable manners of a well-trained servant. First, with a murmured apology, he bows to the lady; then, having respectfully waited till the silence becomes marked, says :)*

MAN. Good evening, sir.

PARNELL (*glancing again at the note*). You are a valet?

MAN. Yes, sir.

PARNELL. Are you wanting a place?

MAN. No, sir. I have a place.

PARNELL. Well?

MAN. That gentleman, sir—my last employer, dismissed me without a character.

(His reference is to the note which Parnell still holds open in his hand.)

PARNELL. Well ?

MAN. That's all, sir.

PARNELL. Then what have you come here for ?

MAN. To give you this, sir.

(He draws out and presents a letter, rather soiled by keeping, which has already been opened. There is a pause, while Parnell looks first at the address, then runs his eye over the contents.)

PARNELL. May I show it to—this lady ?

MAN. Oh, yes, sir.

PARNELL. Whom, I take it, you recognise ?

MAN. Yes, sir. *(And meeting her glance, he bows once more.)*

(Parnell hands over the letter, and while Katharine reads there is a pause.)

PARNELL. Did you bring me this expecting money for it ?

MAN. No, sir.

PARNELL. I see it has a date. You could have let me have it before ?

MAN. Yes, sir.

PARNELL. More than—six months ago ?

MAN. More than a year ago, sir.

PARNELL. Quite so. And you did not ?

MAN (*eyeing him steadfastly*). No, sir. I was still comfortable in his service then, sir.

PARNELL (*ironically, after a pause of scrutiny eye to eye*). I am singularly obliged to you. . . . How did you come by it, may I ask?

MAN. Well, sir, he'd been dining out, sir. Left it in his pocket—hadn't posted it.

PARNELL. I see. . . . Had your dismissal anything to do with this?

MAN. Oh, no, sir. That only happened quite recently.

PARNELL. And then—he dismissed you without a character, you say? Do you think you deserved one?

MAN. From him, sir?—yes, sir.

PARNELL (*coldly amused*). That is a good answer. Have you been put to any expense coming here?

MAN. Just my return fare, sir.

PARNELL. And were you expecting me to——?

MAN. No, sir; I could have sent it in the post, if I'd wished.

PARNELL (*surprised*). Do you mean, then, that I may keep this letter?

MAN. Yes, sir.

PARNELL. I may do what I like with it?

MAN. Just what you like, sir.

PARNELL. Thank you.

(*After a pause of meditation he very deliberately tears up the letter and puts it into*

the fire. Then, with rather icy politeness :)

I am much obliged to you ; and I wish you a good evening.

(A little crestfallen, but with quiet self-possession, the man accepts the termination of the interview.)

MAN. Good evening, sir. *(He moves to the door.)*

PARNELL. Stop !

(The man turns as the other goes towards him, and they meet face to face.)

You haven't given yourself a very good character, coming here, my man ; but you might have done worse. Anyway, you've washed your hands of it now. Don't do things like that again.

MAN. No, sir.

(And as he stands hesitating, Parnell opens the door.)

Thank you, sir.

(The man goes. Parnell closes the door after him, comes meditatively across, and sits down. There is a long pause.)

KATHARINE. What are you—thinking ?

PARNELL. A year ago ! . . . If he had come to me with that a year ago—what should I have done ?

KATHARINE. You would have done just the same.

PARNELL. Torn it up? And put it in the fire?—
I'm not so sure.

KATHARINE. But I am. Hadn't he the same
right as I had, to live his own life?

PARNELL. My dear, I said "a year ago." That
means before the case came on. That would have
stopped it—for good. . . . If I had had it—I
might have been tempted.

(Watching him, she sees him smile.)

KATHARINE (*rather tremulously*). Are you glad—
that you didn't have it?

PARNELL. And use it? Yes: I am—glad!

KATHARINE (*throwing herself into his arms*). Oh,
my dear! Why, that means everything. You're
glad! You're glad!

PARNELL (*clasping her*). Oh, my own love, my own
dear sweet!

KATHARINE. You regret—nothing?

PARNELL. Nothing. Haven't I made you sure of
that—yet?

KATHARINE. Oh, my King!—my King!

(*And just then the paper in the grate kindling
into flame, he points to it.*)

PARNELL. Look! there goes—our proof.

KATHARINE. It doesn't matter.

PARNELL. It never did.

KATHARINE. That's what I mean.

PARNELL. But, politically, it might have made a world of difference.

KATHARINE. Yes—to the world ; not to us. We wanted to be as we are, didn't we ?

PARNELL. As we are, and as we were—how long is it ?—eleven years ago. There's been no change since. When I go back to my star, I shall have found what I came for. That's what matters most. Souls either find or lose themselves—live or die. I lived : I shouldn't have done, on this earth, but for you—but for you.

(*There is a pause. He sits meditating.*)

KATHARINE. And of what—now ?

PARNELL. The next generation—possibly the next but one : you and I gone, and Ireland free. In this last year we may have done more for that—than we could ever have planned. We've given them a bone to bite on : and there's meat on it—real meat. And because of that, they call you my ruin, eh ? I look rather like one, I suppose, just now. But as I came home to-night, all my mind was filled with you ; and I knew that to me you were worth far more than all the rest. And then suddenly I thought—what am I worth to you ?

KATHARINE. This—that if now you told me to go —because it was for your good—I'd go—glad—yes glad that you'd made me do for you, at last, something

that was hard to do—for the first time, dearest, for the first time !

PARNELL (*deeply moved*). That so ? Not an accident, then, eh ?

KATHARINE (*embracing him*). Oh, my dear, my dear, my dear !

PARNELL. How true to life love makes everything !—so clear and straight—looking back now. Through you I've learned this truth at any rate—that there are two things about which a man must never compromise—first his own soul, the right to be himself—no matter what others may think or do.

KATHARINE. And the other ?

PARNELL. His instinct, of trust or distrust, in the character of others. I hadn't any real doubt, but I compromised with instinct to gain my end : did things I didn't believe were any good—accepted the word of men I didn't trust. Home Rule itself was a compromise that I made myself accept. But I never really believed in it. For you can't limit the liberty of a nation, if it's really alive. Then came the smash—that woke me. And that I was awake at last our love came to be the proof. . . . Something different has got to be now. Ireland will have to become more real—more herself, more of a rebel than ever she has been yet. If, thirty years hence, my failure shall have helped to bring that about—an Ireland really free—then I've won. . . .

(*The words come quietly, confidently ; but it*

is the voice of an exhausted man, whose physical resources are nearly at an end. For a long time he sits quite still, holding his wife's hand, saying nothing, for he has nothing more to say. A high screen behind the couch on which they rest cuts off the gaslight; only the firelight plays fitfully upon the two faces. Suddenly the brightness falls away, and over that foreshadowing of death, now only three days distant, the scene closes.)

The Man of Business

Dramatis Personæ

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

(*Ex-Minister*).

JESSE COLLINS

(*His Friend*).

A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR.

A NURSE.

The Man of Business

SCENE: Highbury. August 1913.

Between double-doors, opening from living-room to conservatory, sits the shadow of the once great and powerful Minister, State Secretary for the Colonies. To the dark, sombre tones of the heavily furnished chamber the gorgeous colours of the orchids, hanging in trails and festoons under their luminous dome of glass, offer a vivid contrast. Yet even greater is that which they present to the drawn and haggard features of the catastrophically aged man whose public career is now over. In wheeled chair, with lower limbs wrapped in a shawl and supported by a foot-rest, he sits bent and almost motionless; and when he moves head or hand, it is head or hand only, and the motion is slow, painful, and hesitating, as though mind functioned on body with difficulty, uncertain of its ground. Nevertheless, when the door opens, and the small squat figure of a very old and dear friend advances towards him, his face lights instantly. With tender reverence and affection the newcomer takes hold of his hand, lifts, presses it, lays it back again. And when he has seated himself, the Shadow speaks.

CHAMBERLAIN. Well, Collins ? Well ?

JESSE COLLINS. Well, my dear Chamberlain, how are you ? I'm a little late, I'm afraid.

CHAMBERLAIN. I hadn't noticed. Time doesn't matter to me now.

JESSE COLLINS. No ; but I like to be punctual. It's my nature.

CHAMBERLAIN. Habit. . . . Habit and nature are different things, Collins. I've been finding that out.

(At this, for a diversion, Collins, readjusting his pince-nez, tilts his head bird-like, and takes a genial look at his friend.)

JESSE COLLINS. Joe, you are looking better to-day.

CHAMBERLAIN. Well, even looks are not to be despised, I suppose, when one has nothing else left.

JESSE COLLINS. Come, come !

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes ?

JESSE COLLINS. Nothing else left, indeed ! Don't —don't be so *down*, Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN. Dear old friend ! . . . Just now you called me "Joe." You don't often do that. Why did you ?

JESSE COLLINS. A reversion to old habits, I suppose. One does as one gets older.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes.

JESSE COLLINS (*genially making conversation, which he sees to be advisable*). I was reading only the other day that, as we get on in years and begin to forget other things, our childhood comes back to us.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes ?

JESSE COLLINS. Now I wonder if that's true ?

CHAMBERLAIN. I wonder.

JESSE COLLINS. Mine hasn't begun to come back to me.

CHAMBERLAIN. You aren't old yet.

JESSE COLLINS. I'm over eighty.

CHAMBERLAIN. Good for another twenty years. And once you were my senior. We weren't quite boys together, Collins ; but we've been good friends.

JESSE COLLINS. Thank God for that !—Joe.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, I do. More now than I used to.

JESSE COLLINS. All the same, you haven't so much cause to thank Him as we have.

CHAMBERLAIN. No ?

(*The listless monotone makes the little old man fear that he is not succeeding.*)

JESSE COLLINS. Is my talk tiring you ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Not at all. . . . Please go on !

JESSE COLLINS. I only want to say what I said

just now: Don't be down, dear friend. Your record will stand the test better than that of others. Your work is still going on; it hasn't finished just because you are—laid up.

CHAMBERLAIN. "Laid up" is a kind way of putting it, Collins.

JESSE COLLINS. Why, I needn't even have said that; when here—it's *sitting* up I find you.

CHAMBERLAIN. *Sitting out.*

JESSE COLLINS. Well, "sitting out," if you like, for the time being. But do you imagine that this phrase or that phrase (true for the moment) states the case, counts, is worth troubling about?

CHAMBERLAIN. Do I imagine? No, I don't. I don't imagine anything. I was never a man of imagination.

JESSE COLLINS. You are, when you say that!

CHAMBERLAIN. No, Collins. When I've done anything, it has been because I've had it in my hands to do. . . . My hands are empty now. Some men manage to think with their heads only; others do it—with their stomachs you might almost say. I've never been able to think properly unless I had hold of things—had them here in my hands. . . . Look at them, now! (*With a slow, faint gesture he indicates their helplessness; then continues:*) I was the man of business, . . . and now, I'm out of business; so I can't think.

JESSE COLLINS. But that business, as you call it, Chamberlain, which you made so many of us understand for the first time—I was a “Little Englander” myself, once—that’s still going on.

CHAMBERLAIN (*bitterly*). Yes, it’s a fine business !

JESSE COLLINS (*startled*). Don’t you still believe in it ?

CHAMBERLAIN. As a business ? Yes. But it’s going to fail all the same. There’s nobody to run it now.

JESSE COLLINS. We mean to run it, Chamberlain ! You’ll see !

CHAMBERLAIN. I know you do, Collins. You are loyalty itself.

JESSE COLLINS. There are others too. I’m not the only one.

CHAMBERLAIN. You are the best of them.

JESSE COLLINS. No, I won’t admit that.

CHAMBERLAIN. Name ?

JESSE COLLINS. The best ? Probably some one we don’t yet even know. The best are still to come. Time’s with us.

CHAMBERLAIN. Is it ?

JESSE COLLINS. Don’t you think so yourself ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Not now. I did once.

JESSE COLLINS. You always said so.

CHAMBERLAIN. I said it as long as I believed it : till the stars in their courses turned against me. That broke me, Collins. If I could have gone on having faith in myself, I shouldn't be—as I am now.

JESSE COLLINS. But what—what made you lose it ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Can't you guess ?

(Collins shakes his head, remains valiantly incredulous ; and there is a pause.)

I saw somebody else—whose cards weren't so good —playing with a better hand. It was the hand beat me. My head's all right still, though it sleeps. But I've lost my hand. Look at it ! (Again the gesture illustrative of defeat.) Threw it away. You know who I mean ?

JESSE COLLINS (*cautiously, rather reluctantly*). I suppose I do.

CHAMBERLAIN (*watching to see the effect of his news*). He's coming to-day : to see me.

COLLINS (*surprised*). Coming here ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, it's all been nicely arranged —just a call in passing. To-morrow's papers will describe it as "a pathetic meeting." Well, when a man has to meet his executioner on friendly terms, I suppose it is "pathetic" for one of them.

(All this is very disconcerting to poor Collins.

He helps himself to a half-sentence, and stops.)

JESSE COLLINS. Did he himself——?

CHAMBERLAIN. Propose it? Oh, yes—in the most charming way possible. Isn't it amazing how a man with charm can do things that nobody else dare? I never managed to charm anybody.

JESSE COLLINS. You made friends—and kept them.

CHAMBERLAIN. So does he. He has been successful all round: art, politics, letters, society—he has friends in all. I've only been successful in business.

JESSE COLLINS. My dear friend, aren't you forgetting yourself? You came *out* of business.

CHAMBERLAIN. No, I only changed to business on a larger scale—carried it on under a bigger name. That's how I found myself. I had to make things into a business in order to make a success of them. That was my method, Collins: glorify it as much as you like. And up to a point it was good business, I don't deny. That's how we ran local politics, invented the Caucus: Corporation Street is the result. That's how we managed to run Unionism: made a hard and fast contract of it, and made them stick to it. That's how I ran the Colonies—and the Boer War. That's how I was going to run the Empire on a Preferential Tariff. That came just too late. I'd made a mistake.

JESSE COLLINS. What mistake?

CHAMBERLAIN. Collins, the Boer War wasn't good

business. It might have been ; but it lasted too long. Any modern war that isn't over in six months now is a blunder, you'll find. They were able to hold out too long. That did for me. There have been bees in my bonnet ever since—all because of it. Boers first ; then Bannerman ; then—Balfour. Just once my business instinct betrayed me, and I was done !

JESSE COLLINS. But—wasn't the war necessary ?

CHAMBERLAIN. To put the " business " on a sound footing ? Yes, I thought so ; it looked like it. No, it wasn't ! But before I quite knew, there'd come a point where we couldn't go back ; and so we just had to go on—and on. D'you know what was the cleverest thing said or done during that war ? . . . You'd never guess . . . but it's true. Campbell-Bannerman's " methods of barbarism " speech. We downed him for it at the time, but it caught on—it stuck. And it was on the strength of it (with C.-B. as their hope for the future) that the Boers were persuaded to make peace : saved our face for us. They might have gone on, till we got sick of it, and the world too.

JESSE COLLINS. I don't—I can't think you are right, Chamberlain. You are forgetting things.

CHAMBERLAIN. No—I've had difficulty about thinking so myself ; but it has come to me.

*(And so he sits and meditates over the point
in his career where as a business man he
first failed. Presently he resumes :)*

When two men, whose qualifications I used rather to despise, beat me at business, Collins—it was a facer !

JESSE COLLINS. Bannerman ; and—the other ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Comes to see me to-day. But it won't be a business meeting. He'll not say anything about it—if he can help.

JESSE COLLINS. And you ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Perhaps I shall succumb to his charm. I've done so before now.

JESSE COLLINS. Have you and he—had words ever?

CHAMBERLAIN. Differences of opinion, of course. "Words" ? How should we ? He was always so wonderfully accommodating, so polite, so apologetic even. Nobody ever had a finer contempt for his party than he—not even old Dizzy, or Salisbury, or Churchill. So he could always say the handsome thing to one—behind its back—even when he was making burnt-offerings to its prejudices.

JESSE COLLINS. And when you left him ?

CHAMBERLAIN. When I left him he did the thing beautifully. So genuinely sorry to lose me ; so sure of having me with him again, before long. How could I have gone out and worked against him after that ? But it's what—as a business politician—I ought to have done.

JESSE COLLINS. If you had—should we have won, straight away ?

CHAMBERLAIN. We should have won the party,

and the party-machine too. For the rest it wouldn't have mattered waiting a year or two. Yes, we should have won. But here's this, Collins : we should have won then ; we shan't win now. Times are changing : the time for it is over. Something else is coming along—what, I don't know. My old fox-scent has gone : wind's against me. The Colonies are growing up too fast. They won't separate, but they mean to stand on their own feet all the same : in their own way—not mine. We ought to have got them when they were a bit younger : we could have done it then. Once it flattered them to be called "Dominions" ; now they are going to be "Sovereign States." And he—he doesn't mind. He is never for big constructive ideas—only for contrivances : takes things as they come, makes the best of them—philosophically—and gets round them ; and sometimes does it brilliantly.

JESSE COLLINS. What will he talk about ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Anything that comes into his head : the weather, the garden, the greenhouses, the theatres. He'll tell me, perhaps, of a book or two that I ought to read, that he hasn't had time for. He'll say, as you said, that I'm looking better than he expected. He'll say something handsome about Austen—quite genuinely meaning it. Then he'll say he's afraid of tiring me ; then he'll go. . . . Have you noticed how he shakes hands ? He hasn't much of a hand—not a real hand—but he does it, like everything else, charmingly.

JESSE COLLINS (*a little crestfallen*). I thought you really liked him.

CHAMBERLAIN. So I do. Because he has beaten me, is that any reason for hating him? If it were—after a lifetime of polls and politics, one would have to be at hate with half the world. No, from his point of view he had to beat me, and he has done it. What I stick at is that he has proved the better business man! As I used head and hand—and heart (*and heart, Collins!*)—

JESSE COLLINS. Yes, yes, I know you did.

CHAMBERLAIN. Some people thought I hadn't a heart: "hard as nails" they called me. . . . Well, as I used those, so he used his defeats, his doubts, his indecision, his charm—and left his heart out. That was the real business-stroke. That did for me. . . . I liked him: he knew it. Whether he ever liked me, to this day, I don't know—for certain. If he did, it made no difference. That's what I call business.

JESSE COLLINS (*warmly*). But you've always been honourable.

CHAMBERLAIN. So has he. Don't be sentimental, Collins! But some men manage in public life to give you a certain view of their character: so that you count on it. And then, on occasion, they play another—and get wonderful results. If I'd had that gift, I should have used it and done better. He has used it, and he has done better. I don't whine about it. But I'd rather, Collins (I suppose I'm prejudiced),

I'd rather he hadn't asked himself here—just now: not just now.

(*There is a pause, and Collins feels that he must say something; but finding nothing of any value to say, he merely commentates with a query.*)

JESSE COLLINS. What has "just now" to do with it?

CHAMBERLAIN. "Just now," dear Collins, only means the next few months or so—possibly a year. That's all. I had rather he'd waited, and then just sent a wreath with the right sort of inscription on it. He could have done that charmingly too. And I haven't got wreaths here for *him*, for I don't think that even a posy of these would really interest him.

(*And with a weary gesture he points to the orchids, as though they were things of which, not impossibly, "posies" might be made.*)

JESSE COLLINS (*a little perplexed by this introduction of wreaths and flowers into political affairs*). What does really interest him? He's so interesting himself.

CHAMBERLAIN. You've hit it, Collins. It's himself. Not selfishly. He stands for so many things that he values—that he thinks good for the world—necessary for the stability of the social order. He is their embodiment: he is the most emblematic figure in the modern world that I know—in this country, at any rate—representing so much that is good in the

great traditions which have got to go. And to stave off that day he will do almost anything. He would even—if he thought it would enable him the better to prick some of his bubbles—he would even take office under Lloyd George.

(*At this point, unobtrusively, a Nurse enters and stands waiting.*)

JESSE COLLINS. I don't think we shall live to see that!

CHAMBERLAIN. I shall not; you may.

JESSE COLLINS (*impulsively*). Chamberlain, I don't want to live after you!

CHAMBERLAIN (*cajolingly*). Oh, yes, you do! Anyway—I want you to. You will send me a wreath that will be worth having.

(*Whereat his quaint little companion leans forward, and, putting his two hands pleadingly on the swathed knees, wants to speak but cannot. Slowly the sick man lets down his own and covers them. And so, hand resting on hand, he continues speaking :)*

Say what you like about the business man—the man who failed: he has known how to make friends—good ones. And you, Jesse Collins, have been one of the best: I couldn't have had a better. There's someone been waiting behind you to give you a hint that you are tiring me—staying too long. But you haven't: you never have. Perhaps, in the future, I shan't see enough of you; perhaps, from now on,

my doctor will have to measure even my friends for me: three a day before meals. But I shall get life in bits still—as long as you are allowed to come. . . . Yes, Nurse, you make take him away now!

(*Jesse Collins rises, and stands by his friend with moist eyes.*)

JESSE COLLINS. Good-bye, my dear Joe, and—God bless you.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes . . . good-bye!

(*Hands press and part, and Jesse Collins tip-toes meekly out, apologising for the length of his stay by the softness of his going. Chamberlain's head drops, his face becomes more drawn, his hands more rigid and helpless. Without a word, his Nurse arranges his pillows, preparing him for the sleep to which his unresisting body gradually succumbs.*)

* * *

(*Two hours later he is awake again, and the Nurse is removing a tray from which he has just taken some nourishment. He lifts his head and looks at her. At this sign that he is about to speak, she pauses. Presently the words come.*)

CHAMBERLAIN. Is he in there, waiting to see me?

NURSE. Yes, sir.

CHAMBERLAIN. Ask him to come in.

NURSE. You want to see him alone, sir?

(*There is a pause.*)

CHAMBERLAIN. I think only one at a time is enough—better for me: don't you?

NURSE. It would be less tiring for you, sir.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes. Ask him to come in.

(So that being settled, she goes, and he sits waiting. The afternoon sunlight is making the orchids look more resplendently themselves than ever. So still, so vivid, so alive, they hang their snake-like heads in long pendulous clusters; and among them all there is not a single one which shows the slightest sign of falling-off or decay. Presently the door is softly opened, and the Nurse, entering only to retire again, ushers in the Distinguished Visitor, whose brow, venerable with intellect, and grey with the approach of age, crowns a figure still almost youthful in its elasticity and grace, and perfect in the deliberate ease and deportment of its entry into a situation which many would find difficult. As he approaches the wheeled chair, the kindness, modesty, and distinction of his bearing prepare the way before him, and his silence has already said the nicest of nice things, in the nicest possible way, before he actually speaks. This he does not do till he has already taken and held the hand which the other has tried to offer.)

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR. My dear Chamberlain, how very good of you to let me come ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Not too much out of your way, I hope ?

DIST. v. On the contrary, I could wish it were more, if that might help to express my pleasure in seeing you again.

CHAMBERLAIN. Well, what there is of me, you see. You are looking well.

DIST. v. And you—much better than I expected.

CHAMBERLAIN. Did you expect anything ?

DIST. v. I was told that you had bad days occasionally, and were unable to see anybody. I hope I am fortunate, and that this is one of your good ones ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Well, as they've let you see me, I suppose so. I don't find much difference between my good and bad days. (Won't you sit down ?) I'm still in the possession of my faculties ; I sleep well, and I don't have pain.

DIST. v. (*seating himself*). And my staying with you for a little is not going to tire you ?

CHAMBERLAIN. It's far more likely to tire you, I'm afraid.

DIST. v. No, indeed not ! Apart from anything else it is a welcome respite on the journey. Motoring bores me terribly.

CHAMBERLAIN. Then you had really meant coming this way, in any case ?

DIST. v. I had been long intending to ; and when,

last week, Hewell proposed itself, all fitted together perfectly.

CHAMBERLAIN. Are they having a house-party?

DIST. V. I think not: I trust not. No, I believe a hint was dropped to them that it wasn't to be—that I was feeling far too stale for any such mental relaxation.

CHAMBERLAIN. Are you? You don't look like it.

DIST. V. In politics one tries not to look like anything; but how at the end of the session can one be otherwise?

CHAMBERLAIN. Is all going on there—as usual?

DIST. V. Yes . . . yes. I don't find being in opposition makes as much difference as I expected, as regards work. One misses the permanent official who always did it for one. Wonderful creatures—who first invented them? Pitt, or was it Pepys? Oh, no, he was one of them. A product, perhaps, of the seventeenth century.

CHAMBERLAIN. In Tudor times Prime Ministers were permanent, weren't they?

DIST. V. Their heads weren't. Executions took the place of elections in those days. And there's something to be said for it.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes. There was more dignity about it; it gave a testimonial of character; the other doesn't.

DIST. V. Still, electoral defeat is very refreshing. Rejection by one's own constituents is sometimes a blessing in disguise: it saves one from undue

familiarity. . . . That has never happened to you, has it ?

CHAMBERLAIN. It depends what one means by—constituents. In the strict sense—no.

(And now there is a pause, for something has been said that is not merely conversation. Very charmingly, and with a wonderful niceness of tone, the Distinguished Visitor accepts the opening that has been given him.)

DIST. V. Chamberlain, I have been wanting to come and see you for a long time.

CHAMBERLAIN. Thank you. So I—guessed.

DIST. V. I wrote to you—a letter which you did not answer. Perhaps it did not seem to require an answer. But I hoped for one. So, after not hearing, I made up my mind to come and see you.

CHAMBERLAIN. That was very kind of you.

DIST. V. No, it wasn't; it was natural. We've worked together—so long. And I wanted to assure myself that there was, personally—that there is now—no cloud between us ; no ill-feeling about anything. If I thought that remotely possible, I should regret it more than I can say. Speaking for myself—

CHAMBERLAIN. If you had not thought it possible—should you have come ?

DIST. V. I cannot conceive how that would have made any difference.

CHAMBERLAIN. Still, if you had not thought it possible, you would hardly have asked the question.

DIST. V. Well, now I have asked it. Speech is an overrated means of communication—especially between friends; but it has to serve sometimes. And you, at least, Chamberlain, have never used it as—Talleyrand, was it not?—recommended that it should be used—for concealment.

CHAMBERLAIN. So you think that—in words at any rate—I've been honest?

DIST. V. I should say pre-eminently.

CHAMBERLAIN. And—loyal?

DIST. V. I have never had differences—political divergences—with any man more loyal than you, Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN. Thank you. I value that—from you. So the question's answered. On my side there is no cloud, as you tell me I have nothing with which to reproach myself.

DIST. V. Thank you for the reassurance. In that case the heavens are clear.

CHAMBERLAIN. I hope they are properly grateful. Such a testimonial—from two men looking in opposite directions—is an embracing one.

DIST. V. Opposite? Oh, I had hoped—though we may not see eye to eye in everything—that still, in the main, we were in general agreement.

CHAMBERLAIN. Possibly. I daresay “a half-sheet of note-paper” might still cover our “general agreement,” so long as we only talked about it. That served us for—two years, did it not? But I wasn't meaning—as to our political opinions. I meant that

you are still looking to the future ; I can only look back.

DIST. V. That, for you, must be a retrospect of deep satisfaction. It has made much history.

CHAMBERLAIN. Catastrophes make history—sometimes.

DIST. V. You helped to avert them.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, for a time. But another may be coming, and I shan't be here then. And if I were, I should be no use.

DIST. V. Oh, don't say that ! Nor can I agree, either. No use ? Your good word is a power we still depend on. No, Chamberlain, we cannot do without you.

CHAMBERLAIN. You did—when you accepted my resignation.

DIST. V. For a fixed and an agreed purpose. In a way that only bound us more closely.

CHAMBERLAIN. I thought so then. But it has turned out differently.

DIST. V. Has it ? I should not have said so. Am I not to count on you still ?

CHAMBERLAIN. As a diminishing force ? Yes ; I shan't disappoint you.

DIST. V. Oh ! (*Deprecatingly, as of something that need not have been said.*) But not that at all !

CHAMBERLAIN (*rubbing it in*). Necessarily : one who, as I said, can only look backward. Forward, I

am nothing. Believe me, I have measured myself at last. This is no miscalculation—like the other.

DIST. V. The other ?

CHAMBERLAIN. My resignation.

DIST. V. Was that one ?

CHAMBERLAIN. It certainly had not the effect I intended.

DIST. V. Surely you were not then intending to force me against my own judgment ?

CHAMBERLAIN. No ; but I thought you, and the rest, would follow.

DIST. V. I think we did : I think we still do. But sometimes, with followers, following takes time.

CHAMBERLAIN. It will take more than my time. That is where I miscalculated.

DIST. V. But, my dear Chamberlain—if one may be personal—you are maintaining your strength, are you not ? The doctors—are hopeful ?

CHAMBERLAIN. The regulation paragraphs are supplied to the papers, if that's what you mean.

DIST. V. But I had this from members of your own family.

CHAMBERLAIN. Quite so ; it is they who supply them.

DIST. V. Then, if the source is so authoritative, surely it must be true.

CHAMBERLAIN. Are newspaper paragraphs in such cases—ever true ?

DIST. V. Perhaps I am no judge. As you know, I seldom read them.

CHAMBERLAIN. Aren't the probabilities that they will always overstate the case—as far as possible?

DIST. V. That is a course which, as an old politician,—speaking generally—I must own has its advantages. So often, when things are uncertain, one has to act as if one were sure.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, you've done that—sometimes. Sometimes you haven't. I shouldn't call you an old politician, though. Being old is the thing you've always managed to avoid. And yet, you've been in at a good many political deaths first and last.

DIST. V. That, in itself, is an ageing experience.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes? . . . I wonder.

DIST. V. Oh, but surely!

CHAMBERLAIN. *I* wasn't sure; but I take your word for it.

DIST. V. In politics, somehow, the deaths seem always to exceed the births: those who go have become more intimate: one has got to know them. Yes, the departures do certainly overshadow the arrivals.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yet sometimes they must have come to you as a relief.

DIST. V. My dear Chamberlain, don't say that! It isn't true.

CHAMBERLAIN. Oh! I wasn't thinking of myself just then.

DIST. V. You were thinking, then, of somebody?

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, I was. I was thinking of George Wyndham. What a beautiful fellow he was ! so clever, so handsome, so charming : a man cut out for success, by the very look of him. And then, all at once, down and out : the old pack had got him ! How they hunted him ! "Devolution !" Wouldn't they be glad to get that now ?

DIST. V. At the time it was impossible.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, you accepted that, I know. . . . It broke his heart. . . . Did you go and see him—when he was dying ?

DIST. V. I used to go and see him when I could—yes, frequently ; we had been great friends. Not immediately—a month or two before, was the last time, I think.

CHAMBERLAIN. And so with him, too, you could say that you remained friends to the last ! You have had a wonderful career : friends, enemies, they all loved you. Gladstone (who hadn't as a rule much love for his political opponents) made an exception in your case.

DIST. V. Yes, I owed a great deal to his generous friendship. It gave me confidence.

CHAMBERLAIN. Harcourt, too, always spoke of you with affection.

DIST. V. Oh, yes ; we had a brotherly feeling about Rosebery, you know.

CHAMBERLAIN (*ignoring his diversion*). Randolph hadn't though. He was bitter.

DIST. v. Randolph was a performer who just once exceeded his promise, and then could never get back to it. That was his tragedy. Strange how, when he lost his following, his brilliancy all went with it.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, it was strange, in one so independent of others. He had a great faculty, at one time, for not caring, for being (or seeming) ruthless. It's a gift that a politician must envy. It hasn't been my way to lose my heart in politics : it's not safe. But—you charmed me.

(There is an implication here that the quiet tone has not obscured. And so the direct question comes :)

DIST. v. Chamberlain, I must ask. What is there between us ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Nothing—nothing now at all—or very little.

DIST. v. No, no ; you are too sincere to pretend to misunderstand me like that.

CHAMBERLAIN. In politics can one afford to be quite—sincere ? Openly, I mean ?

DIST. v. You have been—far more than others I could name.

CHAMBERLAIN. That is a friendly judgment. Others wouldn't say so. If a man stays in politics till he ceases to be important, while others remain important, there's bound to be a change of relations.

DIST. v. In our case I don't admit that it has happened.

CHAMBERLAIN. Don't you? You were our party-leader. I broke away; so you had to break me. From your point of view you were right. I thought I knew the game better than you. I made a mistake.

DIST. V. Do you mean, then, that you intended to break *me*?

CHAMBERLAIN. Oh, no. But I meant to—persuade you.

DIST. V. My view is that you did—very thoroughly. Surely I went a long way—conceded a great deal.

CHAMBERLAIN. "Half a sheet of note-paper" was the measure of it. Yes, that speech was a great success, and you remained our leader. But your halving of that sheet was the beginning of—my defeat, your victory.

DIST. V. I don't recognise either. At this moment we are both defeated, in a sense: out of office, that is to say.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, but you will come back. I shan't.

DIST. V. But—in all its essentials—what you stand for will.

CHAMBERLAIN. As a hang-fire, perhaps, while parties temporise and readjust themselves to a new balance. But never the same thing again. The time for it has gone. I missed it.

DIST. v. You mustn't be depressed, Chamberlain. Great policies, new orientations, need careful nursing—testing too. Conditions are changing very rapidly.

CHAMBERLAIN. Mine are getting worse. I have two nurses now—night and day: and I obey orders.

DIST. v. You do well to remind me. You shouldn't have let me tire you.

(*And so saying he rises.*)

CHAMBERLAIN. You don't. You used to, now and then, when we didn't agree. You had the deliberate mind, your own fixed rate of progression: one couldn't hurry you. And your semitones, and semicircles, and semi-quavers used sometimes to worry me, I own. They don't now: having become a monotone myself, I acquiesce. *I'm* the slow one, now: you've set me my pace. . . . Here I sit, stock still.

DIST. v. (*lightly diverting the conversation from its impending embarrassment.*) With your old associates still round you, I see!

(*And he touches a trail of blossom admiringly, as he continues:*)

They, at least, in their reflected glory, look flourishing; for they, too, have had a share in your career, have they not?

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, they helped me to get into *Punch*, I suppose, if not into Parliament. Yet, I never thought of it, till it happened—'twas a mere accident. Would you like to take one with you?

DIST. V. I don't usually so efface myself, but I will with pleasure. This one is quite exquisite. May I ? Thanks (*and the glory of it goes to his button-hole*). I notice, too, that it has a scent.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, that is a new kind, hard to rear. There are very few of it in England yet, and nowhere growing so well as they do here.

DIST. V. That is so like you, Chamberlain—you are the born expert ; everything you touch—it's in your blood. Whatever you have done, you have done successfully.

CHAMBERLAIN. So I have your word for it. I was saying to Collins this morning that as a type of the really successful man you had beaten me.

DIST. V. I—a type of success ? My dear Chamberlain ! In my wildest dreams, I aim only at safety ; and if my hesitations have sometimes distressed you, they have been far more distressing to myself. You yourself, in a moment of friendly candour, once described me (so I was told) as the champion stick-in-the-mud.

CHAMBERLAIN. So I did, and it's true. But I said "champion." If you hadn't been such a champion at it, the mud would have swallowed you up alive. Instead of that, you have made it a tower of defence against your enemies. That's why I regard you not only as so successful, but so British.

DIST. V. May I, at least, claim that even for self-defence I have not slung it at my opponents ?

CHAMBERLAIN. No. Why waste it? It's your use, not your misuse of it that I so admire. If you hadn't been such a wonderful politician, you might have been a great statesman.

DIST. v. Doesn't that rather indicate failure?

CHAMBERLAIN. No. Sometimes the political world has no use for statesmen—except to down them. Sometimes it prefers politicians, and perhaps rightly. Every age makes its own peculiar requirements; and those who find out when the political line is the better one to follow, are the successful ones. You and I have been—politicians; let's be honest and own it. And now my particular politics are over. Circumstances have emptied me out. That's different from mere failure. Great statesmen have been failures; we've seen them go down, you and I—too big, too far-seeing for their day. But they went down *full*, with all the weight of their great convictions and principles still to their credit. I'm empty. Time has played me out. That's the difference.

DIST. v. I am confident that history will give a different verdict.

CHAMBERLAIN. Will it? When exactly does history begin to get written? Is a man's reputation for statesmanship safe, even after a hundred years? What about Pitt? Can one be so sure of him now? His European policy may have been a blunder; his great work in Ireland may yet have to be reversed.

DIST. v. In reversed circumstances, that may

become logical. But what has held good for a hundred year, I should incline to regard as statesmanship.

CHAMBERLAIN. "Held good"? Fetters a man can't break "hold good"; but they make a prisoner of him all the same. Policies have done that to nations before now. But would you, on that score, say of them that they have held good?

DIST. V. But let me understand, my dear Chamberlain, what exactly in Pitt's policy you now question?

CHAMBERLAIN. Nothing: I can't see far enough ahead to question anything. I only say, when does history begin to get written? We don't know.

DIST. V. What more can one do than direct it for the generation in which one lives? That, it seems to me, is our main responsibility.

CHAMBERLAIN. Well, that's what you and I have done. How? Mainly by pulling down bigger men than ourselves. Randolph, Parnell, Gladstone—we got the better of them, didn't we? Have you never wondered why men of genius get sent into the world—only to be defeated? Gladstone was a bigger man than the whole lot of us; but we pulled him down—and I enjoyed doing it. Parnell, for all his limitations, was a great man. Well, we got him down too. And I confess that gave me satisfaction. You helped to pull Randolph down; but you didn't enjoy doing it. That's where you and I were different.

DIST. V. I helped?

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes ; it had to be done. And you were sorry for him while you did it—just as you were sorry for Wyndham.

DIST. v. But I did nothing !

CHAMBERLAIN. Quite so. He came down here to fight us in the Central division, and the Conservatives were keen for it. It was touch and go : Unionists were not in such close alliance then ; he might have succeeded. You did nothing ; wouldn't back him. (Quite right, from my point of view.) Randolph went down : never the same man again.

DIST. v. But, my dear Chamberlain, we had our agreed compact.

CHAMBERLAIN. An official understanding, certainly. But that didn't prevent me from going to the Round-Table conference. That also was touch and go ; it might have succeeded. Where would our compact have been, then ?

DIST. v. The Round-Table was merely an interrogation covering a forlorn hope. It failed because you remained loyal to your convictions.

CHAMBERLAIN. It failed because one day two of us lost our tempers—one bragged, the other bullied. That was the real reason. If Gladstone had given me a large enough hand over his first Bill, d'you suppose I shouldn't have been a Home Ruler ? I was to begin with, remember.

DIST. v. Standing for a very different Bill, I imagine.

CHAMBERLAIN. Which you would still have opposed. But I should have won.

DIST. V. Certainly, if we had lost you, it would have made a difference.

CHAMBERLAIN. I was younger then : I'd more push in me. But you would have let me go, all the same. Yes, I've always admired your courage when the odds were against you. . . . So, when the time for it came, you pulled me down too. It had to be done. . . . And here I am.

DIST. V. My dear Chamberlain, you distress me deeply !

CHAMBERLAIN. Of course I do. D'you think I haven't distressed myself too ? Do I look like a man who hasn't been through anything ?

DIST. V. Then—there is a cloud between us, after all.

CHAMBERLAIN. No. I see you clearly ; I see myself clearly. There's no cloud about it ; it's all sharp, and clear, and hard—hard as nails. And I've been able to put it into words—that now you understand. Poor Randolph ! Do you remember how his tongue stumbled, and tripped him, the last time he spoke in the House ? And I saw you looking on, pitying him. You'd got a kind side to you, for all your efficiency. Men like you for that—that charm. . . . It's been a great asset to you. Parnell, how he tried all his life to make a speech and couldn't. But what he said didn't matter—there was the man !

What a force he might have been—was ! What a Samson, when he pulled the whole Irish Party down—got them all on top of him to pull with him. What d'you think he was doing then ? Trying to give his Irish nation a soul ! It looked like pride, pique, mere wanton destruction ; but it was a great idea. And if ever they rise to it—if ever the whole Irish nation puts its back to the wall as Parnell wanted it to do then—shakes off dependence, alliance, conciliation, compromise, it may beat us yet ! They were afraid of defeat. That's why we won. A cause or a nation that fears no defeat—nor any number of them—that's what wins in the long run. But does any such nation—any such cause exist ? I'm not sure. . . . I'm not really sure of anything now, only this : that it's better not to live too long after one has failed. To go on living then—is the worst failure of all.

(As he thus talks himself out, his auditor's solicitous concern has continually increased ; and now when, for the first time, the voice breaks with exhaustion and emotion, the other, half-rising from his seat, interposes with gentle but insistent urgency.)

DIST. V. My dear Chamberlain, you are overtaxing your strength ; you are doing yourself harm. You ought not to go on. Stop, I do beg of you !

CHAMBERLAIN. Stop ? Why stop ? What does it matter now ?

(But even as he speaks, mind and will cease to contest the point where physical energy

fails. His manner changes, his voice becomes dull and listless of tone.)

Oh, yes . . . yes. You are quite right. It's time. I'm under orders now. Would you mind—the bell ?

(Then, as the other is about to rise, he perceives that the Nurse has already entered, and now stands, unobtrusive but firm, awaiting the moment to reassert her sway.)

Oh, it's not necessary. There's the Nurse come again, to remind me that I mustn't tire myself in tiring you.

(And so, under the presiding eye of professional attendance, the Visitor rises and advances to take his leave.)

Thank you—for coming. Thank you—for hearing me so patiently. . . . You always did that, even though it made no difference. . . . I wonder—shall I ever see you again ?

DIST. V. You shall. I promise.

CHAMBERLAIN. I wonder.

DIST. V. I assure you, I shall make a point of it. Believe me, I am very grateful for this opportunity you have given me; and even more am I grateful for all your long loyalty in the past. Through all differences, through all difficulties, I have felt that you were indeed a friend. So, till we meet again, my dear Chamberlain, good-bye !

(The two hands meet and part, while the Nurse moves forward to resume her professional

duties. The Distinguished Visitor begins to retire.)

CHAMBERLAIN. Good-bye. . . . You can find your way ?

DIST. V. (*turning gracefully as he goes*). Perfectly !
(And treating the door with the same perfection of courtesy as he treats all with whom he comes in contact, he goes to take his leave of other members of the family. The door closes ; the Nurse is punching the pillows ; Chamberlain speaks :)

CHAMBERLAIN. So that's the end, eh ? . . . Charming fellow !

(And so saying, he settles back to the inattention of life to which he has become accustomed.)

The Instrument

Dramatis Personæ

WOODROW WILSON

(Ex-President of the United States of America).

MR. TUMULTY (*His Secretary*).

A GRACIOUS PRESENCE.

AN ATTENDANT.

The Instrument

SCENE : *Washington. March 4th, 1921.*

Through the large windows of this rather stiffly composed sitting-room Washington conveys an ample and not unimpressive view of its official character. The distant architecture, rising out of trees, is almost beautiful, and would be quite, if only it could manage to look a little less self-satisfied and prosperous. Outside is a jubilant spring day ; inside something which much more resembles the wintering of autumn. For though this is an entry over which the door has just opened and closed, it is in fact an exit, final and complete, from the stage of world-politics, made by one who in his day occupied a commanding position of authority and power. That day is now over. In the distance an occasional blare of brass and the beat of drums tells that processions are still moving through the streets of the capital, celebrating the inauguration of the new President. It is the kind of noise which America knows how to make ; a sound of triumph insistent and strained, having in it no beauty and no joy.

The Ex-President moves slowly across the room, bear-

ing heavily to one side upon his stick, to the other upon the proudly protecting arm of his friend, Mr. Secretary Tumulty. Into the first comfortable chair that offers he lets himself down by slow and painful degrees, lays his stick carefully aside, then begins very deliberately to pull off his gloves. When that is done, only then allowing himself complete relaxation, he sinks back in his chair, and in a voice of resigned weariness speaks.

EX-PRES. So . . . that's over !

TUMULTY. It hasn't tired you too much, I hope ?

EX-PRES. Too much for what, my dear Tumulty ? I've time to be tired now. What else, except to be tired, is there left for me to do ?

TUMULTY. Obey doctor's orders.

EX-PRES. He let me go.

TUMULTY (*shrewdly*). You would have gone in any case.

EX-PRES. Yes.

(*Tumulty adjusts the cushions at his back.*)

Thank you.

TUMULTY (*seating himself*). Well, Governor, now you've seen him in place, what do you think of him ?

EX-PRES. Oh, I find him—quite—what I expected him to be. I think he means well.

TUMULTY. A new President always does.

EX-PRES. (*slowly pondering his words*). Yes . . . that's true . . . "means well."

TUMULTY (*tactfully providing diversion*). The big crowd outside was very friendly, I thought.

EX-PRES. Yes . . . couldn't have been friendlier. . . . It let me alone.

TUMULTY. Well, of course, they'd come mainly to see the new President.

EX-PRES. Of course. So had I. Yes, I believe Harding's a good man. He was very kind, very considerate. I feel grateful.

TUMULTY (*with rich emotion*). That's how a good many of us are feeling to you, Governor: to-day very specially. It's what I've come back to say.

EX-PRES. That's very good of you. We've had—differences of opinion ; but you've always been loyal.

TUMULTY. I think, President—— Forgive me ; the word slipped out.

EX-PRES. No matter.

TUMULTY. I think there's been more loyalty—at heart—than you know. Behind all our differences, in the party (as, with such big issues, couldn't be avoided)—well ; they didn't cut so deep as they seemed to. They were all proud of you, even though we couldn't always agree. Of course there've been exceptions.

EX-PRES. I don't want to judge the exceptions now (as perhaps I have done in the past) more hardly than I judge myself. . . . Tumulty, I've failed.

TUMULTY (*extenuatingly*). In a way—yes: for a time, no doubt.

EX-PRES. Absolutely.

TUMULTY. I don't agree.

EX-PRES. Because you don't know.

TUMULTY. Governor, I know a good deal.

EX-PRES. Oh, yes; you've been a right hand to me—all through. Others weren't. So I had to leave them alone, and—be alone. When I made that choice, it seemed not to matter: my case was so strong—and I had such faith in it! It was that did for me!

TUMULTY. Chief, I'm not out to argue with you—to make you more tired than you are already. But if I don't say anything, please don't think I'm agreeing with you.

EX-PRES. I'm accustomed to people not agreeing with me, Tumulty. . . . Yes: too much faith—not in what I stood for, but in myself: perhaps—though there I'm not so sure—perhaps too little in others. To some I gave too much: and the mischief was done before I knew.

TUMULTY. You don't need to name him, President.

EX-PRES. I don't need to name anyone now. Some-

times a man may know his own points of weakness too well—guard against them to excess, be over-cautious because of them ; and then, trying to correct himself, just for once he's not cautious enough. But where I failed was in getting the loyalty and co-operation of those who didn't agree with me so thoroughly as you did. And I ought to have done it ; for that is a part of government. Your good executive is the man who gets all fish into his net. I failed : I caught some good men, but I let others go. There was fine material to my hand which I didn't recognise, or didn't use so well as I should have done. I hadn't the faculty of letting others think for me : when I tried, it went badly ; they didn't respond. So—I did all myself.

TUMULTY (*airing himself a little*). You always listened to *me*, Governor.

EX-PRES. Yes, Tumulty, yes. And you weren't offended when I—didn't pay any attention.

TUMULTY. When you *had* paid attention, you mean.

EX-PRES. Perhaps I do. My way of paying attention has struck others differently. They think I'm one who doesn't listen—who doesn't want to listen. It's a terrible thing, Tumulty, when one sees and knows the truth so absolutely, but cannot convince others. That's been my fate : to be so sure that I was right (I'm as sure of that now as ever) and yet to fail. Here—there—it has been always the same. I went over to Paris thinking to save the Peace : there came a point when I thought it was saved :

it would have been had the Senate backed me—it could have been done then. But when I put the case to which already we stood pledged, I convinced nobody. They did not want justice to be done.

TUMULTY. But you had a great following, Governor. You had a wonderful reception when you got to Paris.

EX-PRES. Yes: in London too. It seemed then as if people were only waiting to be led. But I'm talking of the politicians now. There was no room for conviction there; each must stick to his brief. That's what wrecked us. Not one—not one could I get to own that the right thing was the wise thing to do: that to be just and fear not was the real policy which would have saved Europe—and the world. . . . Look at it now! Step by step, their failure is coming home to them; but still it is only as failure that they see it—mere human inability to surmount insuperable difficulties: the greed, the folly, the injustice, the blindness, the cruelty of it they don't see. And the people don't teach it them. They can't. No nation—no victorious nation—has gotten it at heart to say, "We, too, have sinned." Lest such a thing should ever be said or thought, one of the terms of peace was to hand over all the blame; so, when the enemy signed the receipt of it, the rest were acquitted. And in that solemn farce the Allies found satisfaction! What a picture for posterity! And when they point and laugh, I shall be there with the rest. It's our self-righteousness has undone us, Tumulty; it's that which has made us blind and hard

—and dishonest: for there has been dishonesty too. Because we were exacting reparations for a great wrong, we didn't mind being unjust to the wrongdoer. And so, in Paris, we spent months, arguing, prevaricating, manœuvring, so as to pretend that none had had any share in bringing the evil about. When I spoke for considerate justice, there was no living force behind me in that council of the Nations. They wanted their revenge, and now they've got it: and look what it is costing them!

(And then the door opens, and an Attendant enters, carrying a covered cup upon a tray. Upon this intrusion the Ex-President turns a little grimly; but before he can speak, Tumult interposes.)

TUMULT. You'll forgive this little interruption, Governor: I got domestic orders to see that you took it. . . . You will?

(The dictatorial expression softens: with a look of mild resignation the Ex-President touches the table for the tray to be set down. And when the Attendant has gone, he continues:)

EX-PRES. No, they wouldn't believe me when I said that to be revengeful would cost more than to be forgiving. And still they won't believe that the trouble they are now in comes—not from the destructiveness of the War, but from their own destruction of the Peace. I had the truth in me; but I failed. I was a voice crying into the void—a

President without a people to back me: a dictator—of words! And they knew that my time was short, and that I had no power of appeal—because the heart of my people was not with me! If they had any doubt before, the vote of the Senate told them.

TUMULTY. You said “the people,” Governor?

EX-PRES. The people’s choice, Tumulty. The vote *for* the Senate, and the vote *of* the Senate: where’s the difference?

TUMULTY. Still, I don’t think you know how many were with you right through: and I’m not speaking only of our own people. Over there it was your stand gave hope to the best of them, so long as hope was possible. But they were all so busy holding their breath, maybe they didn’t make noise enough. Anyway—seems you didn’t hear ‘em.

EX-PRES. You can’t reproach me with it, Tumulty—

TUMULTY (*expostulant*). I’m not doing that, Governor!

EX-PRES. —more than I reproach myself. If that were true, then it was my business to know it. But what I ought to have known I realised too late. When I heard those shouting crowds—yes, then, for a while, I thought it did mean—victory. But in the Conference at Versailles—Paris—I was in another world: the shouting died out, and I was alone. . . . I hadn’t expected to be alone—in there, I mean. I had reckoned—was it wrong?—on honour counting among

those in high places of authority for more than it did. We went in pledged up to the hilt : not in detail, not in legal terms, not as politicians, perhaps ; but as men of honour—speaking each for the honour of our own nation. And that wasn't enough ; for whom people stand pledged twice over—first in secret, then publicly—it's difficult to make them face where honour lies.

TUMULTY. You mean the secret treaties, Governor. That's been a puzzle to many of us : what you knew about them, I mean.

EX-PRES. Tumulty, I willed not to know them. Rumour of them reached me, of course. Had I then given them a hearing, I might have been charged with complicity, the silence which gave consent. Many were anxious that I should know of them—at a time when opposition would have been very difficult—premature, outside my province. And so—by not knowing—I was free : and when I stated the basis of the Peace terms, I stated them (and I was secure then in my power to do so) in terms which should in honour have made those secret treaties no longer tenable. There was my first great error—I acknowledge it, Tumulty : that I believed in honour.

TUMULTY (*reluctantly*). Yes . . . I see that. But it's the sort of thing one can only see after it has happened. You must have got a pretty deep-down insight into character, Governor, when you came to the top of things over there, to the top people, I mean.

EX-PRES. (*after a pause, reflectively*). Yes, it was

very interesting, when one got accustomed to it: highly selected humanity, representative of things—it was afraid of. There daily sat four of us—if one counts heads only ; but we were, in fact, six, or seven, or eight characters. And the characters sprang up and choked us. Patriots, statesmen ? oh yes ! but also “careerists.” Men whose future depends on the popular vote can’t always be themselves—at least, it seemed not ; for we should then have ceased to be “representative,” and it was as representatives that we had come. And so one would sit and listen, and watch—one person, and two characters. Lloyd George, when his imagination was not swamped in self-satisfaction, was quite evangelical to listen to—sometimes. But there he was representative—not of principles, nor of those visionary sparks which he struck so easily and threw off like matches, but of a successful election cry for “hanging the Kaiser” and “making Germany pay.” And having got his majority, he and his majority had become one. But for that, he might—he just might . . . yet who can tell ? That tied him. I was alone.

TUMULTY (*coming nobly to the rescue*). Then take this from me, Governor : for a man all alone you did wonders.

EX-PRES. I did my best ; but I failed. My first mistake was when I believed in honour ; my second, when I let them shut the doors. Yes, to that he got me to agree. Clever, clever ; that was his first win.

TUMULTY. Who, Governor ?

EX-PRES. (*with a dry laugh*). The man who told me he was on my side. The reason?—a kindly means of saving faces for those whom he and I were going to “persuade”—of making the “climb-down” easier for them! That seemed a helpful, charitable sort of reason, didn’t it? One it would have been hard to refuse. I didn’t; so the doors were shut to cover defeat and disappointment over the secret treaties. Then they had me: three against one! And their weight told—quite apart from mere argument; for each had behind him the popular voice (and when one lost it—you may remember—another came, and took his place). But against me the popular voice had shut its mouth: I, too, was an electioneer—a defeated one. Of my lease of power then, less than a year remained. After the Senate elections I was nothing. In Paris they knew it: and I could see in their eyes that they were glad. Yes, *he* was glad, too.

(*As he speaks, his head sinks in depression.*
There is a pause.)

TUMULTY (*in his best sick-bed manner*). Governor, don’t you think that you’d better rest now?

EX-PRES. (*ignoring the remark*). And so the old secret diplomacy, balancing for power, with war as the only sure end of it, came back to life; and I—pledged to its secracies with the rest—I had to stay dumb. I was a drowning man, then, Tumulty—clutching at straws, till I became an adept at it. There, perhaps, as you say, I did do “wonders”—of a kind: all I could, anyway. That was my plight, while there in Paris we held high court, and banqueted,

and drank healths from dead men's skulls. Did nobody guess—outside—what was going on ? I gave one signal that I thought was plain enough, when I sent for the *George Washington* to bring me home again. But, though I listened for it then, there seemed no response. People were so busy, you say, holding their breath ; and that I couldn't hear.

TUMULTY (*zealous, in a pause, to show his interest*). Well, Governor, well ?

EX-PRES. And then, rather than let me so go and spoil the general effect (the one power still left to me !), they began to make concessions—concessions which, I see now, didn't amount to much ; and so they persuaded me, and I stayed on, and signed my failure with the rest.

TUMULTY (*for a diversion pointing to the covered cup*). Pardon me, Governor, you must obey orders, you know. They are not mine.

EX-PRES. (*taking up the cup with a dry smile*). Executive authority has taught me that obeying orders is much simpler than giving them : you know when you've got them done. (*Removing the cover, he drains the cup and sets it down again.*) There ! now let your conscience be at rest. (*After a pause he resumes :*) Tumulty, when I faced failure, when I knew that I had failed— Yes ; don't trouble to contradict me. I know, dear friend, I know that you don't agree ; and, God bless you ! I also know why. . . . When I knew that, after the whole thing was over, and I was out again and free, do you suppose I wasn't

tempted to go out and cry the truth (as some were expecting and wishing for it to be cried) in the ears of the whole world ?—let all know that I *had* failed, and so—that way at least—separate myself from the Evil Thing which there sat smiling at itself in its Hall of Mirrors—seeing no frustrate ghosts, no death's heads at that feast, as I saw them ? . . . I came out a haunted man—all the more because those I was amongst didn't believe in ghosts—not then. People who have been overwhelmingly victorious in a great war find that difficult. But they will—some day.

TUMULTY. Well, Governor, and supposing you had yielded to this “Temptation,” as you call it, what's the proposition ?

EX-PRES. This . . . I had one power—one weapon, still left to me unimpaired : to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God ! And the proposition is just this : whether to be stark honest, even against the apparent interests of the very cause you are out to plead, is not in the long run the surest way—if it be of God—to help it make good : whether defeat, with the whole truth told, isn't better than defeat hidden away and disowned, in the hope that something may yet come of it. You may get a truer judgment that way in the end ; though at the time it may seem otherwise. Yes, I *was* tempted to cry it aloud—to make a clean breast of it—to say, “We, the Governments of the People, the Democracies, the Free Nations of the world, have failed—have lost the peace which we could have won, because we would not give up the things which we

loved so much better—profit, revenge, our own too good opinion of ourselves, our own self-righteous judgment of others.” . . . I was tempted to it; and yet it has been charged against me that I would not admit failure because I wanted to save my face.

TUMULTY. You have never been much scared by what people *said*, Governor. That didn’t count, I reckon.

EX-PRES. No, Tumulty; but this did—that where all seemed dark, I still saw light. Down there, among the wreckage, something was left—an instrument of which I thought I saw the full future possibility more clearly than others. I believe I do still. And my main thought then was—how best to secure that one thing to which, half blindly, they had agreed. To win that, I was willing to give up my soul.

TUMULTY. It’s the Covenant, you mean, Governor?

EX-PRES. Yes, the Covenant! That at least was won—seemed won—whatever else was lost. Some of them were willing to let me have it only because they themselves believed it would prove useless—just to save my face for all I had to give up in exchange. And so I—let them “save my face” for me; let them think that it was so—just to give this one thing its chance. And so, for that, and for that alone, I bound myself to the Treaty—stood pledged to do my utmost to see it through: a different thing, that, from telling the truth. Was I wrong, Tumulty—was I wrong?

TUMULTY. No, no, Governor! You did everything a man could—under the circumstances.

EX-PRES. I have said that often to myself: and I hope, sometimes, that it may be true. But a man who gives up anything of the truth, as he sees it, for reasons however good—can he ever be sure of himself again? . . . It's a new thing for me to ask another man if I have done wrong. But that's the way I feel: I don't myself know. And once, once, I was so sure—that I was right, and that I should win!

(*The situation has now become one which the friendly Tumulty would like to control, but cannot. As a "soul-stirring revelation of character" he finds it, no doubt, immensely interesting; but to be thus made Father Confessor of the man whom he has followed with humble and dog-like devotion, knocks the bottom out of his world altogether. Moreover, he has received "domestic orders," and is not properly obeying them; and so, dominated by the stronger will, he glances apprehensively, now and again, toward the door, hoping that it may open and bring relief, but himself sits and does nothing. Meanwhile, insistent and remorseless at self-examination, the Ex-President continues to wear himself out.*)

When a man comes really to himself, Tumulty—sees clearly within—does it help him toward seeing

also what lies outside, beyond, and ahead—make him more sure that, as regards others, he has done right ? I don't know—I would give my life to know—if what I did, when all else had failed, was best. The political forces, prejudices, antagonisms, the powers of evil around me, have been so dubiously deceiving and dark, that I do not know now whether to have been uncompromisingly true to principle would have done any good. Perhaps after to-day I shall know better; perhaps only now have I become qualified to judge—a free man at last. Only in the secrecy of my own heart—now finally removed from all the interests, ambitions, fears, which gather about a man's public career—I do most earnestly and humbly pray that in this one thing I did right—not to discredit myself too utterly in the world's eyes, so that *that*, at least, might live.

TUMULTY (*doing his best*). It *will* live, Governor !

EX-PRES. It *may*. But in what hands have I had to leave it ? To men who have no faith in it, to men who dislike it, to men who will try persistently, sedulously, day in, day out, to turn it back to their own selfish ends. There, in those hands, its fate will lie—perhaps for a generation to come. And it is only by faith in the common people, not in their politicians, that I dare look forward and hope that the instrument—blunt and one-sided though it be now—may yet become mighty and two-edged and sharp, a sword in the hand of a giant—of one whose balances are those of justice, not of power. But *I* shan't see it, Tumulty ; it won't be in my day. If

America had come in, I should ! That was the key-stone of my policy : that gone, my policy has failed. That was my faith—is still ; for faith can live on when policies lie dead. Think what it might have been ! America, with that weapon to her hand, could have shaped the world's future, made it a democracy of free nations—image and superscription no longer Cæsar's—but Man's. That—that was what I saw !

TUMULTY. Perhaps they saw it too, Governor. If they did, it might help to explain matters.

EX-PRES. The Covenant was the instrument—and would have sufficed. So organised, America's voice in all future contentions would have been too strong, and just, and decisive to be gainsayed. Then life would have been in it, then it would have prospered and become mighty. It would have meant—within a generation from now—world-peace. Of that I had a sure sense: it would have come. To make that possible, what I had to yield to present jealousies, discords, blindness, was of no account—only look far enough ! For there, in the future, was the instrument for correcting them—the people's vote for the first time internationally applied. And I had in me such faith that America, secure of her place in the world's councils, would have wrought to make justice international, and peace no longer a dream ! Was I wrong, Tumulty, was I wrong ?

TUMULTY (*expanding himself*). No man who believes in America as much as I do will ever say you were wrong, Governor.

EX-PRES. But when America stood out—when the Senate refused to ratify—then I *was* wrong. For then, what I had backed—all that remained then—was a thing of shreds and patches. Nobody can think worse of the Treaty than I do with America out of it, with the Covenant left the one-sided and precarious thing it now is. Had we only been in it—the rest wouldn't have mattered. Call it a dung-heap, if you like; yet out of it would have sprung life. It may still; but *I* shan't see it, Tumulty; and that vision, which was then so clear, has become a doubt. Was I wrong—was I wrong to pretend that I had won anything worth winning? Would it not have been better to say “I have failed”?

TUMULTY. Forgive me, Governor: you are looking at things from a tired-out mind. That's not fair, you know.

EX-PRES. But if you knew, oh, if you knew against what odds I fought even to get that! They knew that they had got me down; and the only card left me at last was their own reluctance to let a discredited President go back to his own people and show them his empty hands, and tell them that he had failed. So a bargain was struck, and this one thing was given me, that peradventure it might have life—if I, for my part, would come back here and plead the ratification of the Treaty which they—and I—had made. Could I have done that with any effect, had I said that in almost everything I had failed?

TUMULTY. Chief, I think you did right. But I

still feel I'm up a back street. How could things have come to fail as much as they did ? After all, it was a just war.

EX-PRES. Tumulty, I have been asking myself whether there can be such a thing as a "just war." There can be—please God !—there must be sometimes a just *cause* for war. When one sees great injustice done, sees it backed by the power of a blindly militarised nation, marching confidently to victory, then, if justice has any place in the affairs of men, there is sometimes just cause for war. But can there be—a just war ? I mean—when the will to war takes hold of a people—does it remain the same people ? Does war in its hands remain an instrument that can be justly used ? Can it be waged justly ? Can it be won justly ? Can it, having been won, make to a just peace ? No ! Something happens : there comes a change ; war in a people's mind drives justice out. . . . Can soldiers fight without "seeing red"—can a nation ? Not when nations have to fight on the tremendous scale of modern war. Then they are like those monstrous mechanisms of long-range destructiveness, which we so falsely call "weapons of precision," but which are in fact so horribly unprecise that, once let loose, we cannot know what lives of harmlessness, of innocence, of virtue, they are going to destroy. You find your range, you fix your elevation, you touch a button : you hear your gun go off. And over there, among the unarmed—the weak, the defenceless, the infirm—it has done—what ? Singled out for destruction what life or lives ;

ten, twenty, a hundred ?—you do not know. So with nations, when once they have gone to war ; their imprecision becomes—horrible ; though the cause of your war may be just.

(*Tumulty gives a profound nod, paying his chief the compliment of letting it be seen that he is causing him to think deeply.*)

That's what happened here. Do you remember, did you realise, Tumulty, what a power my voice was in the world—till we went in ?—that, because I had the power to keep them back from war (for there my constitutional prerogative was absolute), even my opponents had to give weight to my words. They were angry, impatient, but they had to obey. And, because they could not help themselves, they accepted point by point my building up of the justice of our cause. They didn't care for justice ; but I spoke for the Nation then ; and, with justice as my one end, I drove home my point. And then—we went in. After that, justice became vengeance. When our men went over the trenches, fighting with short arms, “*Lusitania !*” was their cry : and they took few prisoners—you know that, Tumulty.

(*Over that point the Ex-President pauses, though Tumulty sees no special reason why he should pause.*)

The *Lusitania* had been sunk, and still we had not gone to war, and no crowds came to cry it madly outside the White House as they might have done—if that was how they felt then. The *Lusitania* lies at the bottom of the sea. There are proposals for

salving her ; but I think that there she will remain. The salving might tell too much.

TUMULTY. You mean that talk about fuse caps being on board might have been true ? Would it matter now ?

EX-PRES. Yes. It was a horrible thing in any case—disproportionate, like most other acts of war—and it did immeasurable harm to those who thought to benefit. But this—I still only guess—might do too much good—bring things a little nearer to proportion again, which the Treaty did not try to do. . . . What I've been realising these last two years is a terrible thing. You go to war, you get up to it from your knees—God driving you to it—unable, yes, unable to do else. Your will is to do right, your cause is just, you are a united nation, a people convinced, glad, selfless, with hearts heroic and clean. And then war takes hold of it, and it all changes under your eyes ; you see the heart of your people becoming fouled, getting hard, self-righteous, revengeful. Your cause remains, in theory, what it was at the beginning ; but it all goes to the Devil. And the Devil makes on it a pile that he can make no otherwise—because of the virtue that is in it, the love, the beauty, the heroism, the giving-up of so much that man's heart desires. That's where he scores ! Look at all that valiance, that beauty of life gone out to perish for a cause it knows to be right ; think of the generosity of that giving by the young men ; think of the faithful courage of the women who steel themselves to let them go ; think of the increase of spirit and

selflessness which everywhere rises to meet the claim. All over the land which goes to war that is happening (and in the enemy's land it is the same), making war a sacred and a holy thing. And having got it so sanctified, then the Devil can do with it almost what he likes. That's what he has done, Tumulty. If angels led horses by the bridle at the Marne (as a pious legend tells), at Versailles the Devil had his muzzled oxen treading out the corn. And of those—I was one ! Yes ; war muzzles you. You cannot tell the truth ; if you did, it wouldn't be believed. And so, finally, comes peace ; and over that, too, the Devil runs up his flag—cross-bones and a skull.

TUMULTY (*struggling in the narrow path between wrong and right*). But what else, Governor, is your remedy ? We had to go to war ; we were left with no choice in the matter.

EX-PRES. No, we *had* no choice. And what others had any choice ?—what people, I mean ? But that is what everyone—once we were at war—refused to remember. And so we cried “*Lusitania !*” against thousands of men who had no choice in the matter at all. Remedy ? There's only one. Somehow we must get men to believe that Christ wasn't a mad idealist when He preached His Sermon on the Mount ; that what He showed for the world's salvation then was not a sign only, but the very Instrument itself. We've got to make men see that there's something in human nature waiting to respond to a new law. There are two things breeding in the world—love

and hatred ; breeding the one against the other. And there's fear making hatred breed fast, and there's fear making love breed slow. Even as things now are, it has managed—it has just managed to keep pace ; but only just. If men were not afraid—Love would win.

That, I've come to see, is the simple remedy ; but it's going to be the hardest thing to teach—because all the world is so much afraid.

(And then, the worn, haggard man, having thus talked himself out, there enters by the benign intervention of Providence a Gracious Presence, more confident than he in her own ruling power. She moves quietly toward them, and her voice, when she speaks, is corrective of a situation she does not approve.)

THE PRESENCE. Mr. Tumulty . . . my dear.

(Resting her hands on the back of the Ex-President's chair, she surveys them benevolently but critically. Then her attention is directed to the covered cup standing on its tray.)

Have you taken your——

EX-PRES. My medicine ? Yes. Your orders came through, and have been obeyed.

THE PRESENCE. It wasn't medicine. I made it myself.

EX-PRES. Then I beg its pardon—and yours.

THE PRESENCE. Will you please to remember that

your holiday began at twelve o'clock to-day ? I'm not going to allow any overtime now.

EX-PRES. That settles it, then, Tumulty. And that means you are to go. I had just been saying, my dear, how much simpler it was to obey orders than to give and to get them obeyed.

THE PRESENCE. Getting them obeyed is quite simple. It is merely a matter of how you give them.

EX-PRES. You see, Tumulty—it's all a matter of "how."

THE PRESENCE. There's someone waiting to speak to you on the 'phone : wants to know how you are. I thought I would come and see first.

EX-PRES. Who is it ?

THE PRESENCE (*indicating the receiver*). He's there.

(*The Ex-President reaches out his hand, and Tumulty from an adjoining table gives him the instrument. As he listens, they stand watching him.*)

EX-PRES. Oh, yes. . . . That's very kind of him. . . . Please will you tell the President, with my best thanks, that I am greatly enjoying my holiday. . . . Thank you. . . . Good-bye.

(*He gives the instrument back to the waiting Tumulty.*)

TUMULTY (*with swelling bosom*). Governor, that was a great answer !

EX-PRES. Easily said, Tumulty. But is it true ?

(*But Tumulty's breast is such a platform for*

the generous emotions that he does not really care whether it is true or not. And therein, between himself and his hero, lies the difference. Grasping his fallen leader forcefully by the hand and murmuring his adieux in a voice of nobly controlled emotion, he obeys the waiting eye of the Gracious Presence, and goes. And as she sees him serenely to the door, the Ex-President looks ruefully at his painfully oversqueezed hand, and begins rubbing it softly. Even the touch of a friend sometimes hurts.)

(The door closes : the two are alone. She who-must-be-obeyed stands looking at him with a benevolent eye.)

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